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ABSTRACT

A joint forensics program including both debate and individual events offers important benefits to students and coaches in training. A complete forensics experience provides what some would consider a true liberal arts education. When exposed to all events, students learn a variety of argumentative styles and develop a variety of universal skills which will serve them in any chosen field. The various events emphasize different skills including research, reasoning, analysis, public speaking, and defense of ideas. Additionally, students become aware of various world views, which, at least in some way, furthers their understanding of the entire human experience. To limit such an education for reasons of bureaucratic simplicity or limited financial resources seems counter to the purpose of a college education. Finally, tournaments should rectify this currently problematic situation by offering both debate and individual events and by introducing a structure that allows students to compete in both. (KEH)

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Philosophizing about Debate and Individual Events Programs

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The first organized intercollegiate forensics competition in the United States was probably either a debate between Harvard and Yale in 1892, (Pelham & Watt 1985; Trueblood, 1926) or one between Michigan and Wisconsin in 1893 (Pelham & Watt, 1985). Competition in debate grew steadily through the early half of this century, leading eventually to the development of the National Debate Tournament in 1946 (Tomlinson, 1983). Individual events competition, by comparison, is a more recent phenomenon. I.E.s gained prominence in the seventies (Schnoor, 1979), with the first national tournament held in 1971 (Twenty years of champions, 1990).

Since then many have conceived of debate and individual events as two competing activities (Aden, 1988). Truly, they are not. Debate and individual events teach different skills and serve different purposes. They prepare students in different ways and should be considered as complimentary activities. Unfortunately, the contrary view appears to be more

prevalent. Programs tend to emphasis one or the other (Aden, 1988), limiting students' access to all forms of forensics training. Such an arrangement adversely impacts all participants in the activity. This paper presents the benefits of a more conciliatory philosophy reflected in a program which provides a student with an opportunity to participate in all facets of forensics competition. Those benefits are experienced not only by students, but also by graduate assistants who are training for careers in forensics. Despite these benefits, there are some problems with such a program, especially for the head administrator. However, those problems are created by the way forensics competition has been framed in recent years, and could be addressed by changing the nature of forensics tournaments. This paper examines the benefits a joint program offers to students and coaches in training. It concludes with a brief discussion of how we can offer these opportunities without contributing to the coaching "brain drain" (Hill, 1979).

Benefits of a Joint Program

Forensics must be viewed as primarily an educational activity. Other than some poetry reading

contests in local coffee houses, there are no "professional" forensics leagues. Thus the emphasis in forensics should not be on the mastery of forensics skills for a professional career. However, all persons, in all walks of life, must speak and defend ideas in public. Thus the goal of forensics should be educational by focusing on preparing students to meet these challenges in whatever career they pursue. Competing in forensics should help a student develop universal skills like research, reasoning and analysis, public speaking, and defense of ideas. Each forensics event involves all of these skills to some degree. However, each event also emphasizes different skills.

For example, individual events (both public address and interpretation of literature) teach the student something about all of the skills. For prepared events the student must engage in research, whether finding an appropriate piece of literature to interpret or locating evidence to support a persuasive speech. Analytical skills are also necessary in these events. In interpretation events these skills are evidenced by how the piece is cut and interpreted, and by the themes emphasized in the presentation. In public speaking

there is even more emphasis on these skills. The credibility of an original piece (be it oratory, informative or rhetorical criticism) partially depends on the speakers' ability to anticipate and respond to arguments which their audience are likely to make. While the preparation is important, delivery is probably the most significant skill in individual events (Aden, 1988). The best prepared speech, delivered poorly, is unlikely to do well in individual events competition. Finally, limited prep events, in addition to teaching all of these skills, also prepare students to "think on their feet."

While most forensic skills are emphasized in individual events, one important facet is not. Defense of positions occurs only in an indirect way. While students' ballot results hinge on their successful execution of the above skills, there are few opportunities for interaction between the competitor and other competitor or judges in which the student must defend his or her ideas. Thus students do not learn to defend their ideals against a direct attack.

The focus of debate is exactly the obvious. Like individual events, debate teaches all of the forensics

skills. However, the focus is more on preparation and defense of ideas and less on delivery and analysis. Contemporary college debate seems to be predicated on the assumption that debate is not a communication activity, but rather a game. Corresponding with that view strategies like the monster spread have been developed to help debaters win the game. These tactics do not necessarily correspond to sound forensic practices (Dowling, 1981). Debate however does place heavy emphasis on preparation and defense of arguments. The development of research skills and learning to defends one's positions from direct attack are critical elements in debate.

Thus each activity serves to further the forensic education of the student. In order to provide a complete forensics education students should be exposed to all events so they can learn a variety of argumentative styles. To limit students' options is to limit the educative nature of forensics.

Competition in both events can also foster better social acceptance. Many programs not only separate debate and individual events, but go further and imply that the other activity is in some way inferior. In a

small way students learn to differentiate people by an outward arbitrary categorization. Integration allows students to see for themselves that the other side is not so different. While it would be quite a stretch to assume that in some way this creates perfect social understanding, there is no reason to doubt that every little bit helps.

Thus a complete forensics experience can provide what some would consider a true liberal arts education. Students can learn a variety of skills which can serve them in any chosen field. In addition, they are exposed to various world views, which in at least some way furthers their understanding of the entire human experience. To limit this education for reasons of bureaucratic simplicity seems counter to the purpose of a college education.

Some forensic competitors choice to continue their involvement in the activity after graduation by becoming forensics coaches. Most of these begin by serving in a type of apprenticeship as a graduate assistant. In the broad classification of "professional" jobs, the Director of Forensics position is unique because of this opportunity for intense pre-training. When graduate

students leave the role of graduate assistant to take an administrative position they may be expected to competently execute all facets of forensics administration. While they may serve their whole career in a position emphasizing one particular facet of forensics, it is hard to know that with any certainty when they take their first job.

Thus the graduate assistantship should be viewed in the same way as competition: as a training forum designed to prepare the student for any future role. That mission can only be achieved in a joint program.

Limitations on the Operation of a Joint Program

Despite the apparent benefits, few schools operate a truly joint program. Usually the decision to limit a program is based on concerns about limited resources, particularly human and monetary. Running a joint program entails a great deal of travel because few tournaments offer opportunities to engage in all forensic activities. Of the over 150 tournaments listed in the 1990-91 AFA forensics calender (Nicolai, 1990), only a small number offered debate and individual events. While the number of joint tournaments is probably enough to fill a schedule they are held in such

geographically diverse locations, the travel requirements would be excessive. Thus a director who wishes to offer all forensics events must travel to one tournament one weekend for debate competition and to a different tournament on another weekend for individual events competition, effectively doubling the travel schedule for programs engaged in both debate and individual events. The toll in terms of financial resources and directors' burn-out is immense.

Thus, given the current state of forensics, it is not surprising that schools choose to phase out one type of competition. Attempting to maintain both diminishes resources and leads to early retirement for coaches due to burn out. This situation, however, can be rectified. Tournaments should offer both debate and individual events and should be structured to allow students to compete in both. Some tournament directors may see this as a ridiculous request. After all, few students currently compete in both. Yet until we offer opportunities for students to engage in all facets of forensics competition we should hardly expect otherwise. In addition, while students may not compete in both debate and individual events, squads do. Thus offering

a joint tournament would still allow directors to service their entire squad with one trip instead of two.

Some would claim that the call for the well rounded forensics student would serve only to create the "jack of all trades, master of none." While this may be true, such a complaint implies that a student should only master one style of argument. Perhaps if students were to continue competing after college that may be true. However, as noted initially, the purpose of forensics is not to create professional forensicators, but to prepare students for life after college. If that is the overall goal of forensics, then we should be preparing students to deal with all situations, not a select few.

The growth of forensics and the expanded number of different opportunities which developed during the sixties and seventies have given rise to new choices for competitors and coaches. These choices should not be seen as a curse or as grounds for fracturing the forensics community. Rather they should be seen for what they were probably originally meant to be: opportunities to expand the horizons of those who choose to compete in one college activity that can offer more than professional contracts.

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